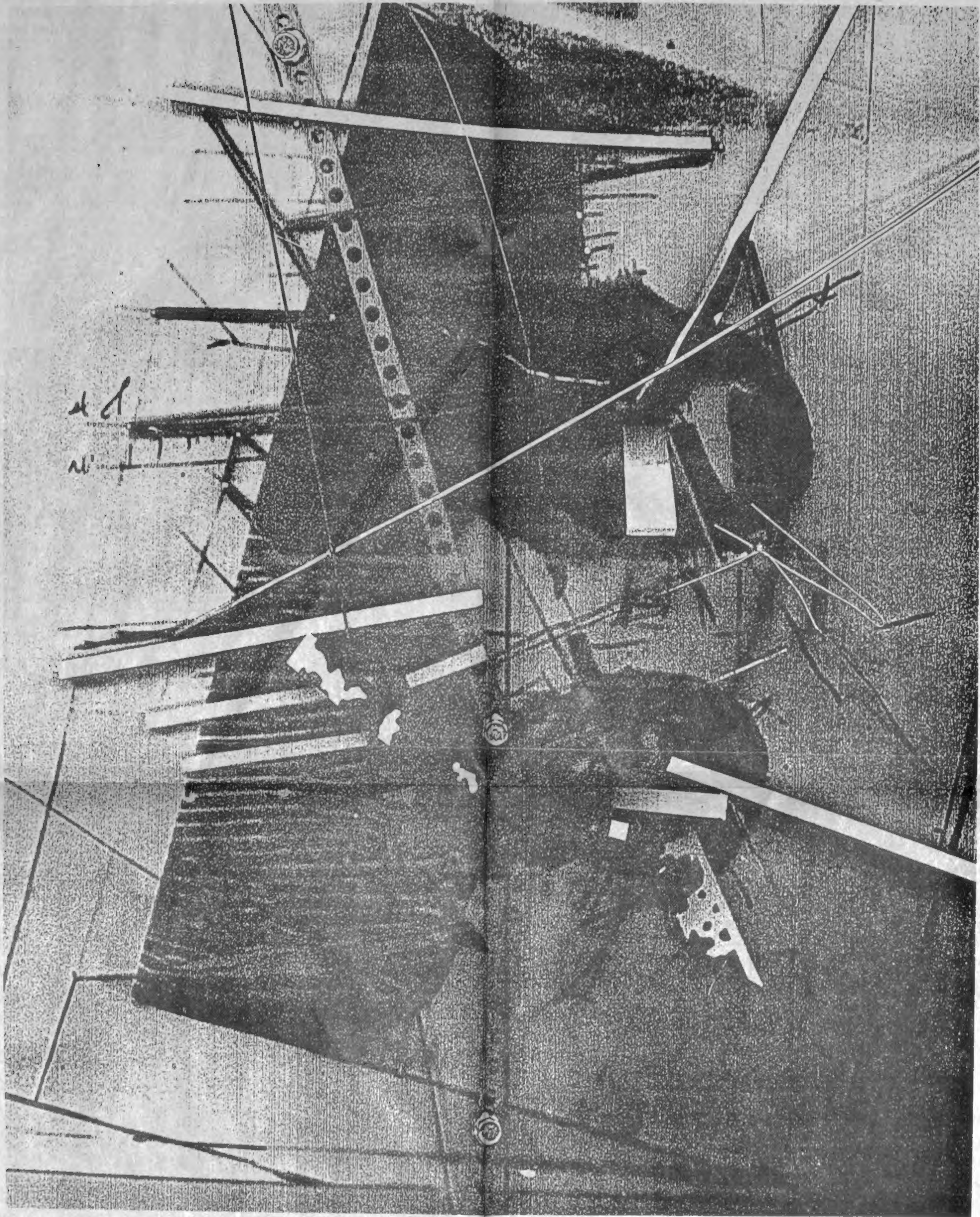


# Coop Himmelblau

the dissipation of our bodies into the city



from Vienna + Los Angeles

**Wolf D. Prix ■ Helmut Swiczinsky**

**March 24-April 23, 1988**

Gallery Hours  
Wed.-Sun. 12-6 PM

Opening Reception  
March 24, 7-9 PM

#### Discussion Program

Critical Issues in Public Art and Public Architecture

#17 April 5

Placement of Public Art

Moderator: Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler

#18 April 12

Searching for Wholeness

Moderator: Dan Coma

All discussion begins 7PM, and \$2 contribution is requested.

## STOREFRONT

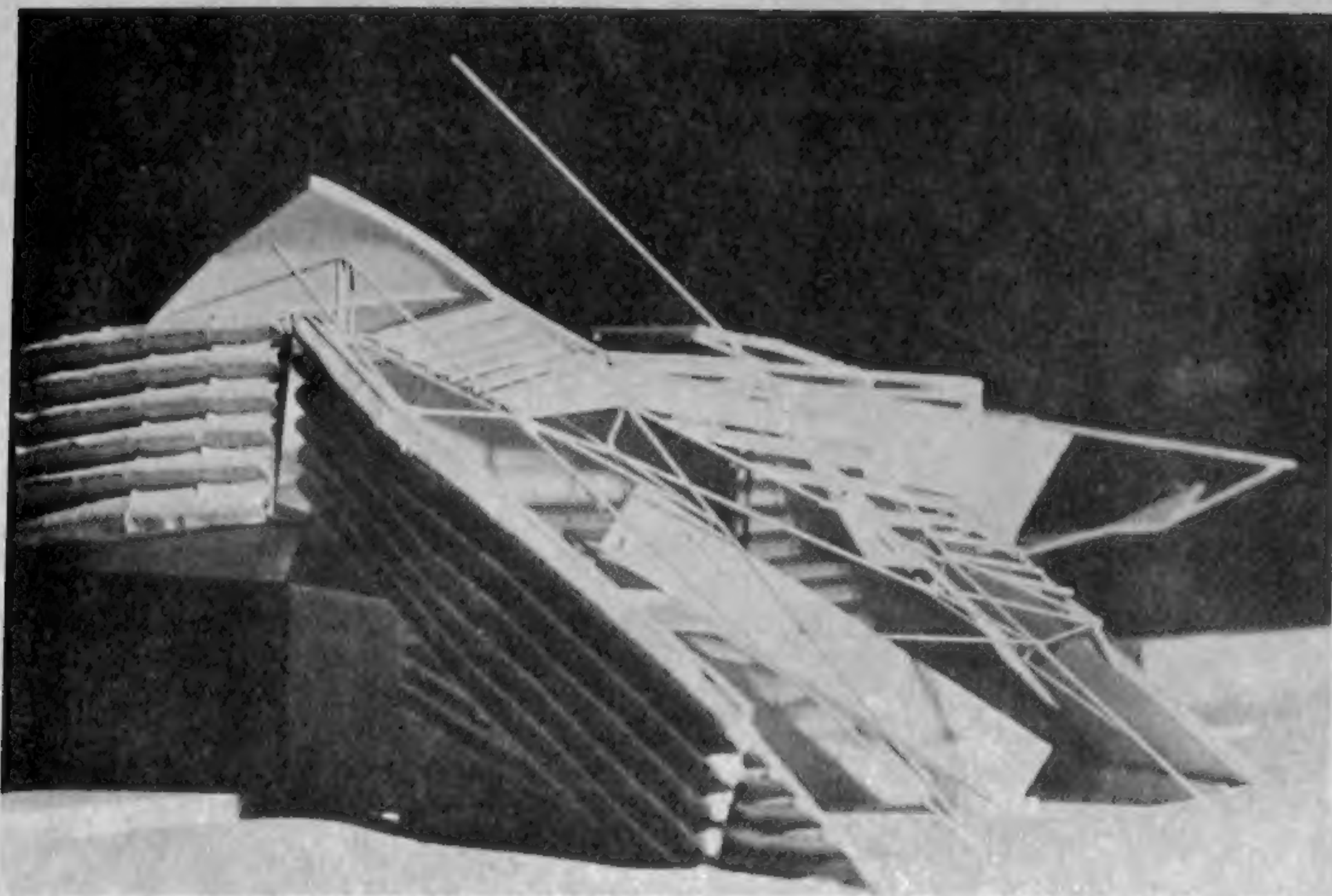
for Art & Architecture

97 Kenmare Street (near Lafayette) New York, NY 10012 212-431-5795

A Not-For-Profit Organization funded in part by NYSCA, DCA and NEA. A Program of CCF.  
This exhibition has been made possible through generous support from the Austrian Institute.



## Next Programs



The Open House, Coop Himmelblau, 1983

### Discussion Program

The following are the premises of each discussion. All discussion begins 7PM, and \$2 contribution is requested.

#### #17 April 5.

**Placement of Public Art**  
Can we determine a more socially active public art by redefining its prescribed placement? What are the spaces that have been determined "public" and why? What influences do these spaces have on the work? Should we expand our present definition of "public" to include rural and suburban contexts, and if so, how? Is placement enough? Can and should the language and forms of public art merge with its social context?

Moderator: Kate Ericson, Mel Ziegler

#### #18 April 12.

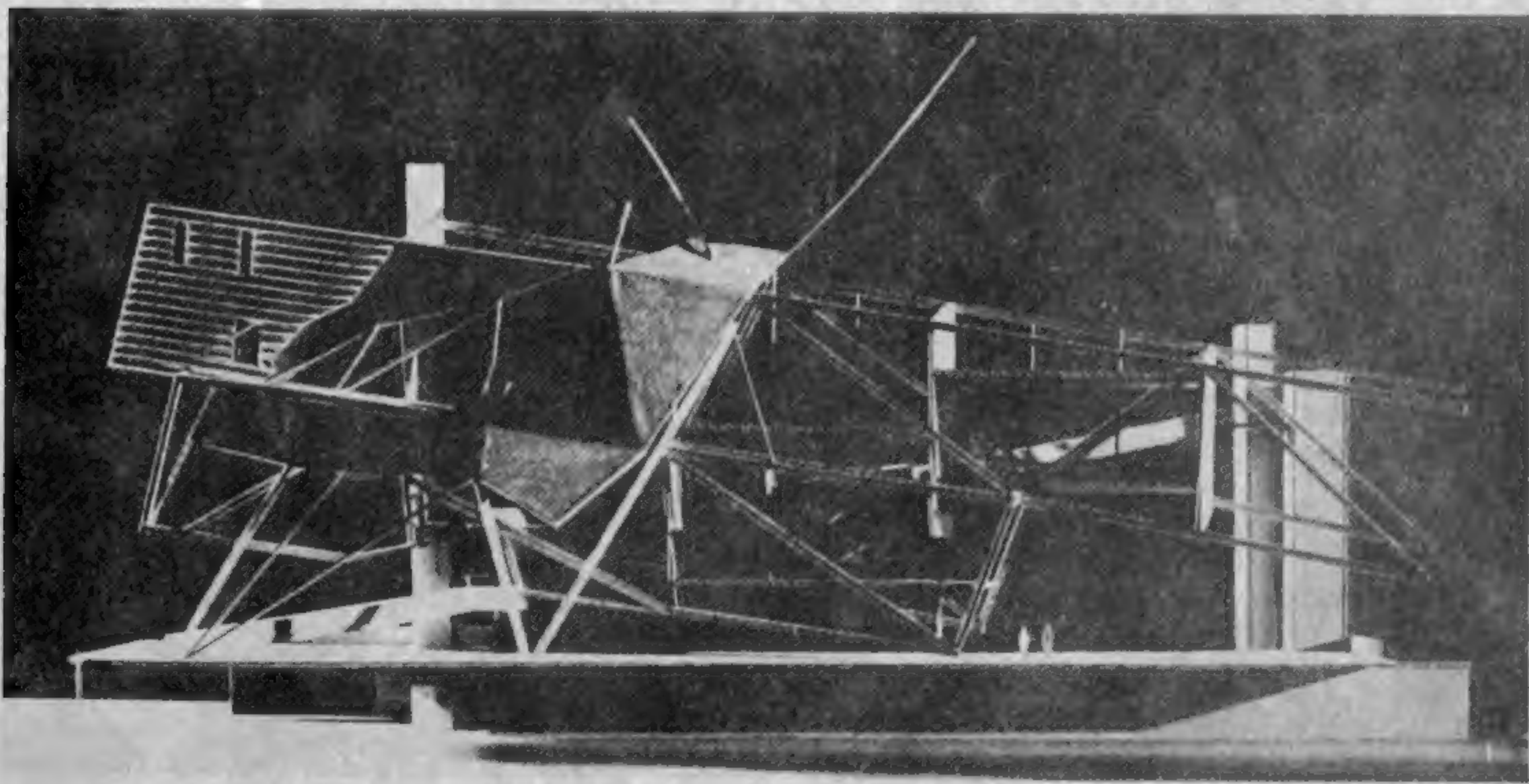
**Searching for Wholeness**  
Dan Coma will lecture with slide presentations of his work from 1978 to 1988. "Searching for Wholeness" is its title and will consist of a comprehensive presentation of the four cycles exposed at P.S. 1 at his one-man show in 1986: *Architectural Icons*; *Thought and Image*; *Architecture and Alchemy*; *Variety in Unity*. Two new cycles will be presented: *The Living Well* and *The Egg Building*, together with other new works. There will also be readings from his poems and his essay, "Prometheus Had a Brother," an excerpt of which appears below:

*Prometheus had a brother. But we forgot him. His name was Epimetheus. He didn't capture our attention for many, too many years. But he was there, silent and modest from the very beginning. Goethe remembered him, but he was one of the very few. Epimetheus didn't bring anything to the humans, except a warning: "Don't fight with Gods for too long." Prometheus brought us the fire and with it everything which followed. We are today grateful to him and everyone today is more or less one of his children. But what happened with Epimetheus? Did he have any children? I don't know, perhaps a few poets, here and there, mere outsiders living on Prometheus' shoulders. Epimetheus was forgotten, captivated as we were with that terrible thing Prometheus gave us: the Fire. But today Epimetheus must be again remembered, as long as it is not too late, must be remembered before the gift we received from Prometheus becomes an invincible monster. Before the fire burns us completely, before parts of buildings fly in the dark night, in the name of a so-called "vigorous modernity."*

Dan Coma

### Future Exhibition/Project Program

*Destruction and Construction* by Kawamata from Tokyo (April 28-May 28, 88). **Project DMZ**, inviting artists and architects to propose programs and designs for public use of the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea before the Summer Olympic 88 (June 16-July 16, 88). **Peter Cook and Christine Hawley** from London (Sept. 88). **Steve Barry** from New York (Oct. 88). **Benta Stokke** from Oslo (Jan. 89). **Kaplan and Krueger** from New York (88/89). **Project Atlas**: exhibition of design proposals for the reuse of abandoned missile silos and scrapped missiles (89). **Michael Webb** from New York (89).



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## Exhibition

Coop Himmelblau:  
the dissipation of our bodies into the city  
March 24-April 23

A context for Coop Himmelblau in New York

Holdouts and continuums exist. Not all architects feel victim to the new romance of the worn-down past, knuckled under to employ—poorly—entablatures and pediments frosted with soft and vacillating pastel stucco, or cowarded coral allegiance to any Post-movement. The Austrian Coop Himmelblau certainly hasn't. Their alignment—their philosophy and intention—has great historical precedent, but if they have looked to history, it has chiefly been theirs and recent. They have shielded themselves from withering historicism by obliquely peeking into, through, and away from an inherited design lineage, taking away neither method nor material, only spirit. And if from this familial past they have in fact ingested some basic tenets of modernism, Coop Himmelblau transfigures those tenets in universal elements of air, fire, and blood expressed in today's materials and material possibilities. This, for architects, almost necessarily promotes projects more than buildings, leads to visionary acts as well as architecture.

Consequently, Coop Himmelblau urges toward a modern-day *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which houses, cafes, stores, criticism, sculpture, prose poems, urban plans, manifestos, "projects (un)buildings, actions, statements, sketches, commentaries" all comprise the group's intention and achievement, whose range is enormously ranging. Coop Himmelblau heralds an architectural statement, not in metaphor, as the phrase usually flies, but in mated words and images, like this unforgettable 1980 chorus reflecting literal pyrography:

#### Architecture Must Blaze

You can judge just how bad the '70s were when you look at its super tense architecture. Opinion polls and a complacent democracy live behind Biedermeier facades.

But we don't want to build Biedermeier. Now now and at no other time. We are tire of seeing Palladio and other historical masks. Because we don't want architecture to exclude everything that is disquieting. We want architecture to have more. Architecture that bleeds, that exhausts, that whirls and even breaks. Architecture that lights up, that stings, that rips, and under stress tears. Architecture should be cavernous, fiery, smooth, hard, angular, brutal, round, delicate, colorful, obscene, voluptuous, dreamy, alluring, repelling, wet, dry and throbbing. Alive or dead. Cold—then cold as a block of ice. Hot—then hot as a blazing wing.

#### Architecture must blaze.

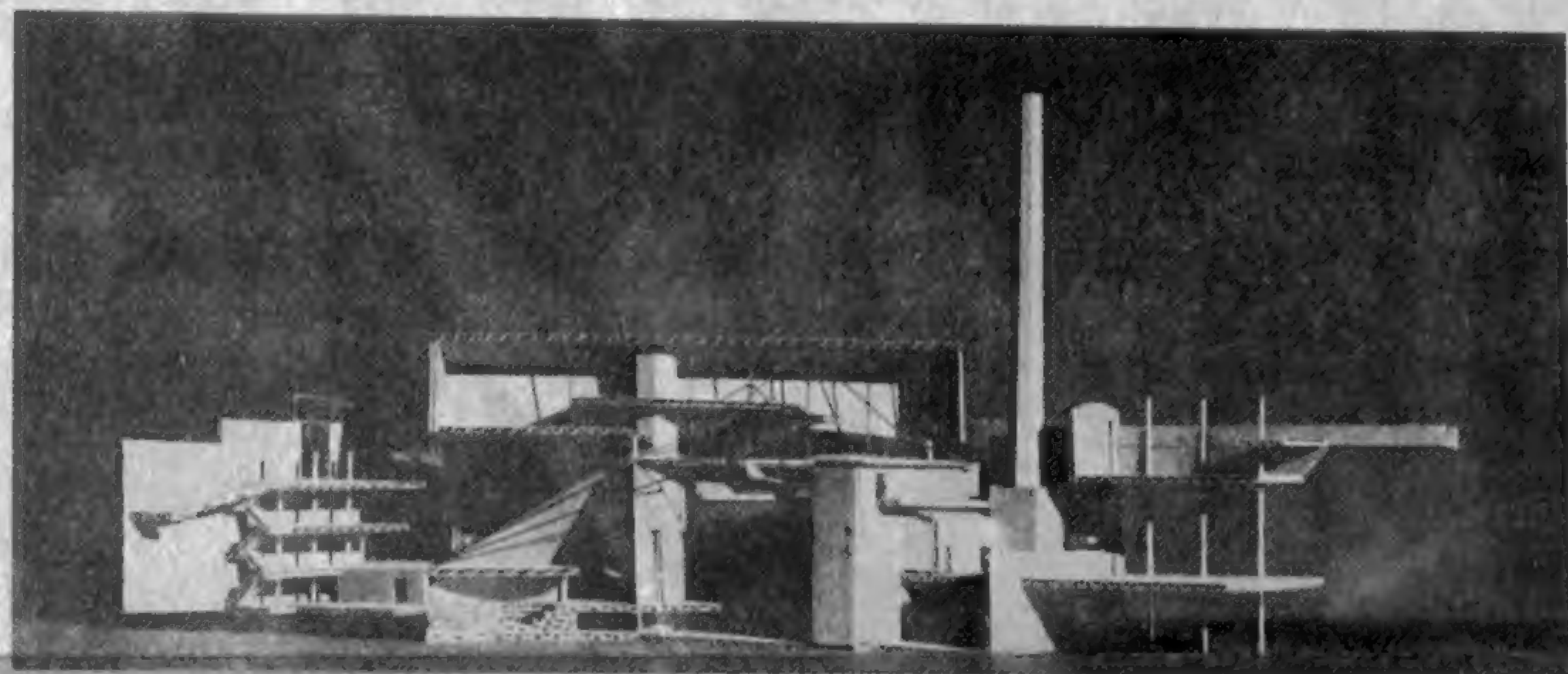
Coop Himmelblau, whose name literally translates as Sky-blue Co-op, thus takes the nature of the so-called built environment seriously: beginning by wanting to aerate contemporary buildings with a bouyancy as "variable as clouds" (hence their name), they turned air into motion with "Restless Sphere" (1971), in which a person within a pneumatic balloon propelled it by walking; incorporated fire in blazing architecture; and converted a human being's heartbeat into pulsating light within a tent-like ribcage that also made the beat audible in "Heartspace" (1969). Recently they spoke of their Open House in California as "Created from an explosive-like sketch drawn with eyes closed. . . . The land as seismograph of those feelings created by the space." In brief, Coop Himmelblau is the metaphysic and media of the physical.

If all this sounds dreamy as newfangled pipesmoke, Coop Himmelblau counters with a revolutionary purpose by choosing to adjust the environment to suit the individual, not the usual other way round, and develops a remarkable "architectural aesthetic of damage" or what they also call "a poetry of desolation" based on the inevitable decay and neglect that result from habitation. One example can be easily stated from their formulation of the basic rights of urban residents, paraphrased as the right to a large living area; the right to an inexpensive living area; the right of personal arrangement of the living area; the right to timely architecture. This line of non-utopian planning is best summed up by Coop Himmelblau in their own phrase "the tougher the times, the tougher the architecture."

As architecture in its usual (and unusual) denotation shrinks before Coop Himmelblau's actual experiment in building, writing, drawing, performing, recording, and reporting space, both internal and external—inside your body and out, inside your dwelling and out, outside your head and in. While the cant of the street may be "I need my space," Coop Himmelblau busily redefines and literally creates that space so that not even the street any longer knows itself—or should.

SITES. A Literary/Architectural Magazine.

Dennis L. Dollens  
Ronald Christ



The Youth Center, Coop Himmelblau, 1983

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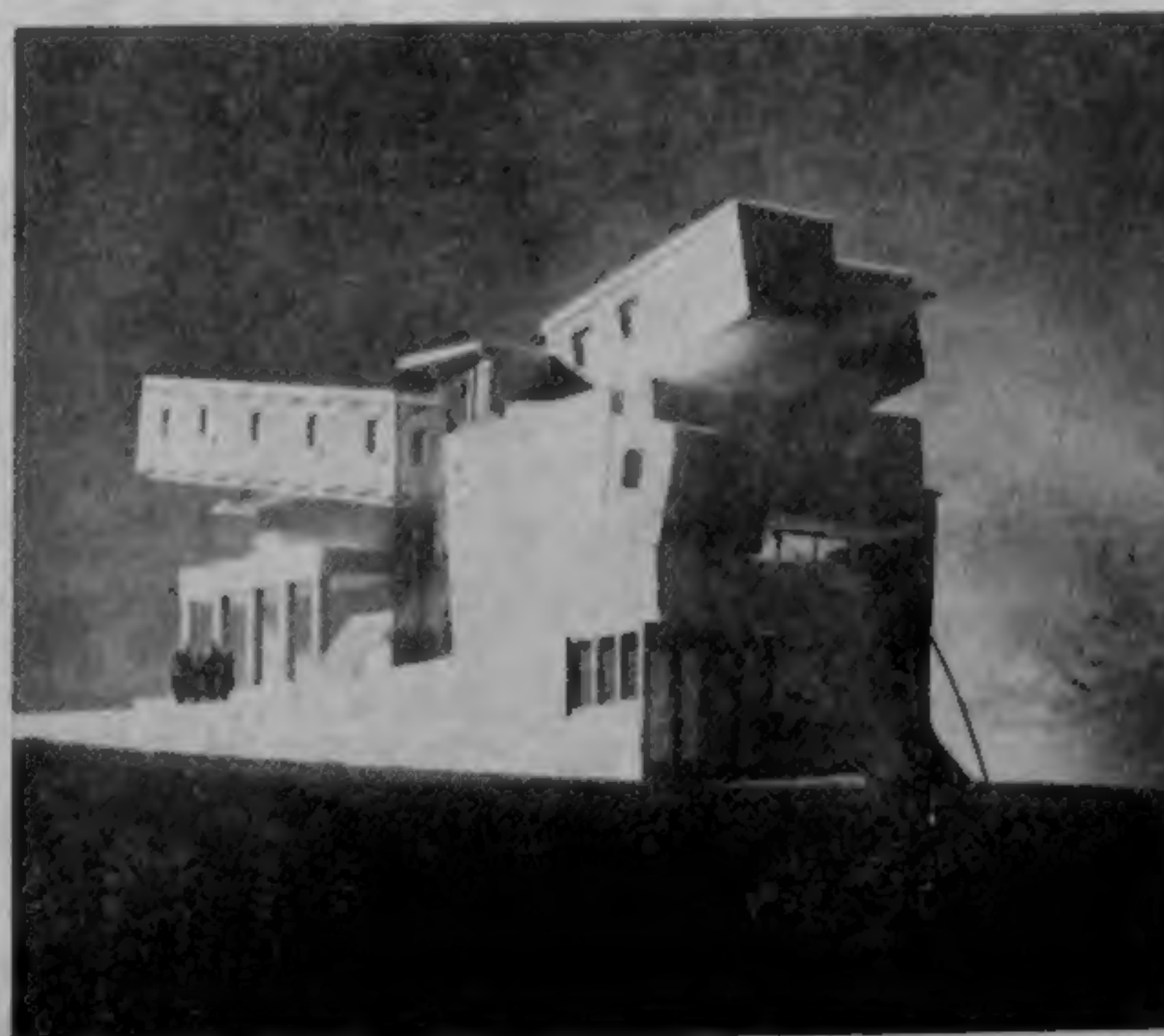
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Merz School, Stuttgart, Coop Himmelblau, 1983